Idaho Naturalist news

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 3 JULY 15, 2014

Pend Oreille Chapter Ends and Begins

2013 Idaho Master Naturalists from the Pend Oreille Chapter received their certifications in May, 2014. Pictured from left to right: Kay Kenneth Duchow, John Albi, Marjorie Clements, Jim, Hiroko Ramsey. Not pictured are Lynette Leonard, James Salminen, Jenn VanVolkinburg, and Katey Huggler.

Cindy Wolcott, Becky Reynolds, Mary Wells, Lea Sammons, Gail Swan, Kath O'siggins, Denise Stouvenel, Bonnie Jakubos. Not pictured, Rob Lilley.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The Idaho Naturalist News is a quarterly newsletter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.

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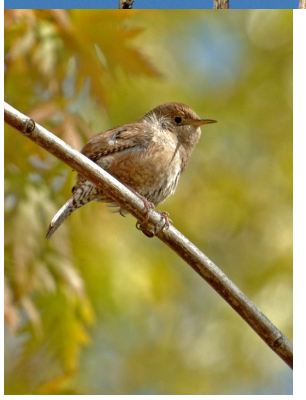
Poetry Page



After the Long Winter

The spring migration
River of color and song
Jump-starts our spirit

Hulls Gulch (Boise foothills) was an excellent place to check out what new birds were arriving in the spring. If parked at the lower lot and proceeding on the trail west toward the lower pond, one saw all sorts of birds at different times: warblers, orioles, lazuli bunting, tanagers, Says phoebes, humming birds, and others. They didn't all arrive at the same time which made it fun to keep returning.

Recently we saw a Nashville warbler, a yellow rump warbler and a Say's phoebe as well as a house wren which perched over our head and called for quite some time.

Photos clockwise starting in upper left: western kingbird, Say's phoebe, lazuli bunting, evening grosbeak, house wren. Poem, narrative, and photos by Robert W. Ellis, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter.

After the Wildfires

Karen K. Davidson, Idaho Master Naturalist, Henry's Fork Chapter

Charcoal trunks still stand,
Swirls of gray ash dance through,
The ghosts of dead trees

Artwork by Anne Clark

Curlew Tracking in Eastern Idaho

Mary VanFleet, Idaho Master Naturalist, Henry's Fork Chapter

I had an opportunity the other day to observe a research project that demonstrates the dedication, hard work, and perseverance of those engaged in scientific study to improve the natural landscape we all treasure here in Idaho. I'd like to share it.

Long-billed Curlew.
Photo courtesy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Long-Billed Curlew (LBC) is a species of *Greatest Conservation Need* in the state of Idaho. Curlews are declining throughout their range, and it is thought that they may be declining in some areas of Idaho at a faster rate than in the rest of their range. Loss of habitat, environmental toxins, and human encroachment may be factors involved. Curlews come to the Rocky Mountains every spring to nest and brood their hatchlings. The Nature Conservancy Flat Ranch on Henry's Lake Flat Ranch (Island Park) in Eastern Idaho has one of the highest densities of nesting curlews in Idaho. Our knowledge of where they go when they leave Idaho in mid-summer is not very good. Research is currently under way at the Intermountain Bird Observatory (IBO) at Boise State University to learn more and answer the many questions researchers have about where the curlews go, what routes they take, and what habitats they require during migration and winter. Answers to these questions may help to explain population declines, and help develop a conservation plan for these amazing birds. Have you ever heard a curlew cry? They have a beautiful song, and nest in open range/grassland meadows, spread flat to the ground. You can practically step on them (accidently) when walking in the meadows during nesting season. The females take the day shift, and the males relieve the females for the night shift. Birds spotted preparing for the "handoff" are typically how IBO researchers identify where the nests are located. Watching the habits of the pair helps researchers to select a suitable nesting pair to try to enroll in the study.

The Nature Conservancy's Flat Ranch. Photo by Mary VanFleet.

At The Flat Ranch, through financial support from The Nature Conservancy and private donations and in collaboration with Idaho Department of Fish and Game and IBO, a curlew was recently fitted with a satellite transmitter and identifying bands so that her travels can be tracked. The transmitter and antenna are contained in a tight 9.5 gram parcel that is placed as a fanny pack, and transmits identification and GPS locations (within ~ 250 meters) for 5 hours out of every 24 hours, and can continue to send information for up to three years. Data is used to develop maps showing where the birds go to feed, and what routes they use in migration to the southern U.S. or Mexico, as well as their travels during the winter months.

Long-billed Curlew with radio transmitter attached.
Photo copyright Liz Urban.

The Flat Ranch curlew trapped and transmittered in 2014 (still awaiting a name at the conclusion of a TNC naming contest but currently called "AH" for the alpha code on her plastic leg band) has just recently completed her "autumn" migration! She departed on June 30 and arrived to the northeastern portion of the Gulf of California by July 2 and seems to have settled into an area southeast of Puerto Peñasco.

First, a curlew needs to be captured. The first attempt to capture a female was a bust. The gusting winds allowed the net to flap in the wind, and she escaped the net before capture. Plan B was brought into play. Another nest found earlier in the day was identified to target. Researchers Jay Carlisle (pictured above) and Heidi Ware, from IBO (with assistance from Rob Cavallaro of IDFG and TNC staff), handled the fine net strung 18 meters between two poles. They identify the location of a nesting female, approach slowly and quietly, and lay the net carefully over the nest, entrapping the female. She's gently taken to a spot where she is measured and fitted with the transmitter that straps to her "hips" below her wings, and fitted with identifying bands on her legs. She is then released into a closed tent to make sure the straps are not binding and that she can walk unrestricted. Then she is released to return to her nest (after scolding the researchers pretty hard for being interrupted from her duty). Her identifying information is logged into a database so that she can be specifically identified as data is transmitted. The entire process of fitting the transmitter took about 30 to 40 minutes.

Here at the Flat Ranch, eggs should be hatched before the end of June, and the curlews will begin migration anywhere from the end of June to late July. Adult females tend to leave first, followed by adult males, and then finally the juveniles. Those chicks are pretty young to make such a long trip! Amazing. One curlew that was transmittered in Montana traveled nearly 1,250 miles in 27 hours! IBO and partners are studying curlews in southwestern Idaho, the Pahsimeroi Valley in east-central Idaho, the Bitterroot Valley in Montana, the National Elk Refuge near Jackson, Wyoming, and the Flat Ranch here in eastern Idaho. Several birds were transmittered last year, and they are all being tracked by the IBO. You can go to their website ibo.boisestate.edu/curlewtracking to see a biography on each bird (all are personally named!), see maps of their travels, and what other information has been gained. You can also donate to their project. Every little bit helps, as these satellite transmitters are very high tech and are expensive! Every donation helps to support another curlew that can participate in the study.

Having the opportunity to observe this research in action was very exciting. This is research that will hopefully provide more detailed information on the curlews' activity while nesting and brooding, and what routes they travel to get to their winter destinations. When enough birds are studied, it is hopeful that a conservation plan can be developed to preserve and maintain populations of these birds in Idaho.

Mary VanFleet is an Island Park resident. She has been an Idaho Master Naturalist since 2008. Mary was the first person in Idaho to start an Idaho Master Naturalist Chapter. She continues to lead her chapter, write articles, volunteer, and attend education sessions.

Volunteers Save the Day

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MKNC

During any given year, nearly 10,000 people come to the Nature Center (Boise) and participate in one of our educational programs. Staffing these programs can be challenging, with most of the demand occurring between April and July. Training volunteers to help with tours has not yielded many committed, skilled volunteers in the past. Guiding a program takes a lot of energy, skill, knowledge, patience and flexibility. I tell prospective guides that tours are 70% group management, and 30 % content and 100% enthusiasm. So, as you can imagine it is hard to find volunteers that work at a 200% level.

This year, we lucked out. Three Master Naturalists approached me with interest in guiding tours. After observing many tours and reading through tour material, they jumped in and pretty much made our tour season the best ever! With a couple of BSU graduate students and 2-3 volunteers, along with MKNC Staff, we are quite a team! With a guiding staff of 7, we smoothly accommodated groups of 115 students + parents this season.

In addition, we were able to use their volunteer hours this spring as match for $2,000 extension of a Forest Service grant we acquired last year! A huge thank you to Margit Donhowe (pictured above), Bronwyn Myers, (pictured to right) and Barb Recla for the hours worked at 200%.

National Conference for Master Naturalists

The Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs (ANROSP) is a parent organization to Master Naturalist-type programs across the United States. The Idaho Master Naturalist Program has been a member of ANROSP for nine years. This year, for the first time, the annual conference is open to program participants (volunteers).

Topics include citizen science, interpretation, program evaluation, family nature programming and more. Three exciting field trips are offered. For more information or to register to http://www.anrosp.org/events.html.